



**RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST BLACK PEOPLE  
IN *THE BLIND SIDE* MOVIE**

**A FINAL PROJECT**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement**

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**In English Department, Faculty of Humanities**

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## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

The writer states truthfully that this final project is compiled by herself without taking the results from other research paper in any university, in S-1, S-2, S-3 degree and in diploma. Furthermore, the writer also explains that she does not take any material from other publications or people's work except for the list mentioned in references.

Semarang, July 31<sup>th</sup> 2018

Elvera Yuniarsih

## MOTTO AND DEDICATION

*“So be patient. Indeed, the promise of Allah is truth.”*

**Surah Ar-Rum (30:60)**

*“Never give up on anyone. And that includes not giving up on yourself.”*

**Dieter F. Uchtdorf**

*“I mean, any fool can have courage. But honor, that’s the real reason you either do something or you don’t.”*

**Michael Oher**

This final project is dedicated to my beloved family,  
and to everyone who supports and motivates me.

Thank you for your unconditional love.

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Semarang, July 30<sup>th</sup> 2018

Elvera Yuniarsih

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project deals with racial discrimination against black people in America as reflected in *The Blind Side* movie by John Lee Hancock. The objectives of this final project are to explain the causes and the types of racial discrimination that are faced by Michael Oher, as a black people and Michael's efforts to overcome his racial problem. The writer analyzed the intrinsic aspects such as characters, setting, conflict, and cinematic elements, particularly camera distances, to understand the development of the story. The sociological approach is used to analyze the extrinsic aspects such as racial discrimination that is suffered by Michael Oher. The writer uses library research in collecting the data. The result shows that racial discrimination in this movie emerges because Michael comes from a black race. Michael proved that he could be freed from the bullying and being capable to equally stood next to white people in America with his strong determination and hard work.

Keywords: Black People, Racial Discrimination, Cinematics Elements.

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Background of the Study**

Racial discrimination is a social phenomenon that is still prevalent in America. It can be seen from the number of disagreeable actions experienced by African American, Asian, American Indian, Native Hawaiian and some other racial groups besides the whites. This antagonism attitude towards minority group is called prejudice that leads to discrimination acts. Blank, Dabady and Citro in their *Measuring Racial Discrimination*, describes racial discrimination as “a differential treatment on the basis of race that disadvantages a racial group and treatment on the basis of inadequately justified factors other than race that disadvantages a racial group” (2004:55). In this study, the writer would like to choose racial discrimination against black people (as a member of African American groups) in America reflected in *The Blind Side* movie, as the topic.

In 2006, there is a famous novel entitled *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game* by Michael Lewis which tells an extraordinary true story about famous football athlete named Michael Jerome Oher Williams Jr. in Tennessee who his background story is well-known in America and it also depicted in the movie *The Blind Side* directed by John Lee Hancock. The writer thinks that *The Blind Side* movie is a perfect depiction for this study since it shows another scope of racial discrimination in 21th century. In this movie, there are some scenes that show various forms of an unpleasant treatment on the basis of race suffered by black people in America.

In order to gather information, the writer uses a library research method. The sources that the writer uses are a movie, printed books, articles, journals and dictionaries. The writer also uses electronic media to find the books, journals, and websites about John Lee Hancock's movie which can not be found on printed version. The writer also uses sociological approaches to analyze the extrinsic element of the movie. It examines literature in the social context in which it is written or received.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

There are some research problems to analyze in this project:

- 1.2.1 What are the causes of racial discrimination acts towards Michael Oher in *The Blind Side* movie?
- 1.2.2 What are the types of racial discrimination towards Michael Oher in *The Blind Side* movie?
- 1.2.3 How does the main character struggles against his racial problem in *The Blind Side* movie?

## **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purposes of the study are presented as follows:

- 1.3.1 To analyze the causes of racial discrimination acts towards Michael Oher in *The Blind Side* movie.
- 1.3.1 To show the types of racial discrimination towards Michael Oher in *The Blind Side* movie.
- 1.3.2 To identify the main character's efforts to overcome his racial problem in *The Blind Side* movie.

#### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

The writer will focused on seeing the causes and types of racial discrimination acts towards Michael Oher as black people in *The Blind Side* movie. The writer will also analyze the intrinsic aspects such as characters, setting, conflict, and cinematic elements, particularly camera distances.

#### **1.5 Previous Study**

Previously, this movie has been analyzed by Rahma Munto Via (2011) from School of Teaching Training and Education Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta as a research entitled “*Women’s Role In Jhon Lee Hancock’s The Blind Side (2009) Movie: A Feminist Perspective Research Paper*”. In her study, she describes that Leigh Anne Touhy has a great influence toward Michael Oher’s life. Therefore, the writer wants to conduct the research with similar movie but with different object of the study. The previous research deals with Leigh Anne Touhy as the main object of the study but in this study Michael Oher will be the main object.

## **2. BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR AND SYNOPSIS**

### **2.1 Biography of John Lee Hancock**

John Lee Hancock was born on December 15, 1956 in Longview, Texas, USA. He is a director and writer of real-life stories, such as *The Blind Side* (2009), *Saving Mr. Banks* (2013) and *The Founder* (2016). John Lee Hancock's career path suddenly changed when he decided to work in the film industry after years of practicing law. In 1993, he started making a name for himself in the movie world when he wrote the feature, *A Perfect World*, directed by Clint Eastwood. Hancock has also done some work for the small screen writing, directing, and executive producing the drama *L.A. Doctors* and executive produced the pilot *Falcone*.

(taken from <https://www.tribute.ca/people/john-lee-hancock/8434/> accessed on June 11, 2017)

### **2.2 Synopsis**

*The Blind Side* movie by John Lee Hancock (2009) is based on the book entitled *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game* by Michael Lewis (2006). This movie is inspired by the extraordinary true story about Michael Jerome Oher Williams Jr., an African-American boy who is adopted by white people named Leigh Anne Touhy and Sean Touhy. Michael, who is often called Big Mike, was a homeless boy who lives in Hurt Village, Tennessee. He was separated from his mother because she was a drug addict and lived in the government projects since then. He was abandoned by many foster families. Until his last foster families helped him to enroll Wingate Christian School by impressing the coach named Burt

Cotton with his sports talent. Even though the other teacher decided to reject Michael because his poor academic records, Burt Cotton was successfully convinced them.

One day, Leigh Anne Touhy was offering Michael to spend a night in her house because he was walking alone on a cold night. Later, he became closer to the Touhy's family and they finally decided to adopt him. Before he was being adopted, he experienced many unpleasant events at school. Michael is a quite, shy boy who does not do well in school, so he is often underestimated by his own teacher. The other students were always giving him a cynical look as Michael walked into the classroom. Even the two little girls suddenly run away when Michael tried to play with them. The reason behind their avoidance is because he was the only black student that has a very big figure in the entire school.

Even after being adopted, Michael still faced the same issues such as verbal antagonism from the other whites, especially from friends and relatives of the Touhy's family. Leigh Anne Touhy's friends started to worry about her daughter-Collins, because they considered Michael as a bad boy who could hurt Collins any time. Apparently, Michael's psychological test shows that he had a strong protective instinct. Seeing his potential, Leigh Anne decided to teach Michael about football game. He started to get better in sport but he still needed a higher score to join the team, so Touhy's family hired a private mentor named Miss Sue to help Michael increase his grade. So, Michael got a lot of scholarship from a different university because of his achievement in football.

Later, NCAA investigator, Granger, asked Michael for an interview that discuss the reason behind his choices to take an Ole Miss University's scholarship. She suspected that Touhy's family adopted Michael just to ensure that he would play for their almanater and got the profit from his recruitment. Michael got mad and left the interview before it done and went straightly to Hurt Village to find his biological mother. Accidentally, he got into a fight with a gang leader and the others because they started to make a sexual offensive about Leigh Anne Touhy and her daughter. In the end, Michael returned to the Touhy's family and defend them in the next interview with Granger. Michael proved that he was able to overcome his racial problems and be freed from the bullying, graduated from high school and become a successful football players of the National Football League (NFL) and played college football for the University of Mississippi.



### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Character**

According to *A Handbook to Literature* by C. Hugh Holman, “*character is a brief descriptive sketch of a personage who typifies some definite quality*” (1960:79). It is used to describe some recognizable type of person. Based on Barnet, Berman and Burto in their *An Introduction to Literature*, figure in literary work are sometimes classified as either flat characters or round characters. Flat characters can be defined as “*a one-dimensional figure with simple personalities*”. Their personalities are undeveloped and typically not central to the story. “*By contrast, round characters is a complex figure*” (1989:37). It shows that there is significant changes of the character throughout the story.

#### **3.2 Setting**

Meyer in his *The Bedford Introduction to Literature* describes setting as one of the literary element that is the context in which the action of the story take places. “*The main elements of setting are the time, place, and social environment that frame the characters*” (1990:107). It is used to have a deeper understanding of the behavior of the characters and the meaning of their actions.

#### **3.3 Conflict**

In general, conflict defined as the main issues that makes the story move. Based on Perrine, conflict can be divided to internal conflict which “*occur between the character against the element in his own nature*” and extrinsic conflict which exist when “*characters struggle against some external force such as physical*

*nature, society or fate*”(1988:42). It is used to express a resistance the protagonist of the story finds in achieving his aims or dreams.

### **3.4 Cinematic Elements**

Cinematic elements can be simply defined as the part of the film. According to Ed Sikov in his *Film Studies: An Introduction*, “camera distances is one of the supporting aspects in making a movie” (2009:6). There are several types of camera distances and the most frequently used are close-up shot, medium shot and long shot. Firstly, there is a close up shot which is “*emphasize the small size details such as shot from head to neck*” (2009:38). It is used to get the detail emotion of the character. Secondly, there is a medium shot which “*focuses on the medium size illustration such as shot from head to hand*”(2009:39). It is used to describes expressions and emotions. The last types of camera distances is a long shot which “*captures the big size image such as shot of the whole human image from head to toe.*”(2009:40). This shot is usually used to describe to one person or character.

### **3.5 Racial Discrimination**

Black people are usually treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity. This kind of situation clearly refers to the act of racial discrimination. This problem occurs because of the historical background of black people. They used to be a slave, so white people usually blame them for most crimes. Nowadays, the slavery system has been abolished, but the problem of racism and discrimination still exists. As a result, black people face difficulties in their social life, such as unequal education problems. Blank, Dabady and Citro in their *Measuring Racial*

*Discrimination* stated that racial discrimination includes two components: “a differential treatment on the basis of race that disadvantages a racial group and treatment on the basis of inadequately justified factors other than race that disadvantages a racial group” (2004:55).

Based on the previous definition, there is a common issues that lead one person to discriminate against another, that is race. Racial discrimination occurs when “a member of one racial group is treated less favorably than another and suffers negative consequences” (2004:40). It states that race can cause discrimination because it has been used throughout history as a means of ranking people socially and classifying them on the basis of their own or their ancestors’ physical characteristics such as their skin color.

The types of racial discrimination in general always shows the explicit hostility stated by the whites towards members of racial minorities. However, discrimination can consist of more than just “intentional or direct behavior such as verbal and non-verbal antagonism and racial avoidance”. It can also be subtle and automatic such as “indirect forms of prejudice caused by a set of unconscious beliefs that affect the attitudes and behaviors of ingroup members towards outgroups members” (2004:56). Their reactions to outgroups member can include “primitive fear and anxiety responses in the brain, negative stereotypic associations, and discriminatory behavioral impulses” (2004:59). They believe that outgroup members should not enforce themselves where they are not wanted.

## 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Characters

#### 4.1.1 Michael Oher

The first main character in *The Blind Side* movie is Michael Oher or Big Mike.

This scene on **Picture A1** uses a long shot to show Michael's appearance. He has a tall and big figure, long-armed, and heavy weight. He always keep his head down as he walk and wears the same old T-shirt and short pants everyday. In **Picture A2**, the close shot illustrate that he has dark tight curly hair, chubby face, thick lips and black skin. He also has such kind eyes and sad-looking face that signifies sadness and depression.



**A1.** 00:02:45 [Disc 1]



**A2.** 00:03:19 [Disc 1]

Michael is a poor boy who has miserable childhood in the west part of Memphis. Although he does not know how to interact with others and has no idea how to learn in classroom, he is really talented in sports. Michael's life starts to changes since he is adopted by Touhy's family. He wears a brand new rugby shirt and long pants. His personality are also changes from the quiet child to a friendly and confident person. He start to interacting with his teacher and the other students. His academics grades are increasing, so he can play sports, graduate

from high school and gets a lots of college scholarship. Therefore, Michael Oher is classified as a round characters in this movie.

#### 4.1.2 Leigh Anne Touhy

Another main character in this movie is Leigh Anne Touhy. In **Picture B1**, the long shot depict Leigh Anne's appearance. She is a good-looking woman who has a slim figure and a general height. She always looks elegance and well-dressed. The next scene in **Picture B2** uses the close shot illustrate that she has shoulder-length blond hair, heart-shaped face, pointed nose and fair skin. She also has a stern face that signifies her fierce nature.



**B1.** 00:00:07 [Disc 2]



**B2.** 00:12:26 [Disc 1]

Leigh Anne is a wealthy woman who comes from the east part of Memphis. She is known as an impatient and perfectionist person. At the beginning of the story, Leigh Anne is anxious when she visit the west part of Memphis because she feel threatened by being around black people. But once she got to know Michael, she slowly changes into an empathetic and brave person. It can be proven when she decides to become his legal guardian and provide a tutor for him. She also have a courage to come to Hurt Village alone just to find Michael. Therefore, she is also considered as a round character in this movie.

## 4.2 Setting

### 4.2.1 Time

The setting of time in *The Blind Side* movie occurs between 2001 to 2009 when George W. Bush serve as the President of America. It can be proves when one of the employees at the Child Protective Service office pointed to a large portrait of President Bush on the wall (see **Picture C1**). As supporting information, 2009 is written on the NFL Draft stage during the movie closing scenes. This scene on **Picture C2** proves that this story occurs in the 21th century.



**C1.** 00:55:23 [Disc 1]



**C2.** 00:54:38 [Disc 2]

### 4.2.2 Place

The major scenes in this movie is taken in several places in a tiny town named Memphis, Tennessee. The story begin in a government housing project in Alabama Street, Hurt Village, where Michael spend his childhood. Later, the story follows Michael's life in nicer neighborhoods on the east part of Memphis, including Wingate Christian School (see **Picture D1**) and Touhy's mansion (**Picture D2**). The other setting of place in this movie are football field, fancy

restaurant, the teacher's office, Child Protective Service office and the investigation room where Michael did an interview with Granger.



**D1.** 00:08:53 [Disc 1]



**D2.** 01:01:51 [Disc 1]

#### 4.2.3 Social Environment

The social environment in this movie shows the differences of living condition between black people and white people in America. The first scene in **Picture E1** uses long shot to illustrate black people neighborhood. They portrayed as a poor people who living in a shabby little town, get an improper education in public school and always associated with criminality. The second scene in **Picture E2** depicts the glamorous life of white people who living in a friendly neighborhood, luxurious house, and get an education in a exclusive church school.



**E1.** 00:02:36 [Disc 1]



**E2.** 00:04:58 [Disc 1]

## **4.3 Conflict**

### **4.3.1 Michael's Conflict with himself**

The internal conflict occurs in Michael Oher character when he feels that he does not belong in his new environment because of the difference in color, size and the way he is dressed. It makes him become a quiet person and isolate himself from the crowd. It can be seen from a poem he write which describes his struggle at school.

“I look and see white everywhere: white walls, white floors, and a lot of white people. The teachers are giving homework and expecting me to do the problems on my own. I have never done homework in my life. I go to the bathroom, look in the mirror and say, ‘This is not Michael Oher’”.

[00:13:09 - 00:13:57] [Disc 1]

### **4.3.2 Michael's Conflict with Leigh Anne**

The external conflict appears between Leigh Anne and Michael after his interview with Granger. Granger makes him believes that all this time the Touhy's uses him just because they want to provide a talented athlete for their alma mater. It upset him and made him decide to leave Leigh Anne and return to Hurt Village.

### **4.3.3 Michael's Conflict with Alton**

Another external conflict occurs between Michael and Alton when Alton start to make a sexual offensive about Leigh Anne and Collins. Alton ask Michael if he had touched Collins. Michael decides to leave and tells him to shut his mouth. Alton get angry and threaten that he will rape Leigh Anne and her daughter, so Michael beat him and they get into a big fight.



#### 4.4 Cinematic Elements in *The Blind Side* Movie

In the term of cinematic elements, different types of shot are used on the people's interaction, such as medium shot is commonly used to frame people interaction with two or less people (see **Picture F1**), and long shot is commonly used to frame three or more people (see **Picture F2**).



**F1.** 00:15:32 [Disc 1]



**F2.** 00:17:26 [Disc 2]

The dominating shoot in this movie is using long shot. For example, the black people neighborhood and the white people neighborhood are framed with long shot to magnify the architecture element such as design of the buildings.



**G1.** 00:03:53 [Disc 1]



**G2.** 00:04:58 [Disc 1]

As shown in **Picture G1**, black people are portrayed living in a shabby little town where several building have collapsed, while in **Picture G2**, white people seem to live in luxurious houses. Long shot is ideal for capturing the

neighborhood because it is able to depict wide area and provide great information about the differences in living condition between black people and white people in America.

In this movie, the shooting tends to be taken indoors, especially in Wingate Christian School and Touhy's mansion to depicts Michael Oher's life in his new environment. The scene in **Picture H1** shows the first day when Michael went to school and met his new friends. The next scene in **Picture H2** depicts Michael and Touhy's family celebrated Thanksgiving in the dining room.



**H1.** 00:09:36 [Disc 1]



**H2.** 00:26:46 [Disc 1]

## **4.5 Racial Discrimination in *The Blind Side* Movie**

### **4.5.1 Causes of Racial Discrimination**

Michael suffered from racial issues because of his physical characteristics which indicate that he came from the black race. It can be proven when Leigh Anne's friends tease her about Michael's appearance in Touhy Family's christmas card during their lunch. They equate Michael with King Kong figure who is known as a black and big creatures.

The other cases occurs during a football match between Crusader and Milford team. The white man from Milford's supporters offended Michael by calling him "black bear". He feels that the game is unfair because a large black boy has to compete against his son team. One of Milford's players, Jimmy, also teased his appearance during the match by calling him "fat black ass". They insulted Michael because of the size and his skin color.

### **4.5.2 Types of Racial Discrimination**

Based on the previous chapter, the writer finds two types of racial discrimination in this movie, namely explicit discrimination and automatic discrimination.

#### **4.5.2.1 Explicit Discrimination**

The first condition emerges on Michael's first day at school. In **Picture I1**, medium shots illustrates the students shocked expression caused by his huge appearance. In **Picture I2**, the two students give Michael a cynical look and eyes the size of his feet as she handed him the exam paper. Michael is sit alone in his desk, look terrified and start to rubs his hand on his knee. It shows that he feels

uncomfortable with his new class where all of the students are whites and no one seems to want to be near him. It proves that non-verbal antagonism can create an unpleasant environment in schools.



I1. 00:09:31 [Disc 1]



I2. 00:09:53 [Disc 1]

The second case emerges at school park when the two little girls suddenly run away when Michael tries to greet them. They avoid Michael because he has a different color from them. It proves that the ingroups member tend to choose to not associate with the members of disadvantaged racial groups because they already have a firm set of belief that black people is an outsiders worthy avoided.

#### **4.5.2.2 Automatic Discrimination**

The first cases occurs in teacher's office during break time. Some of the teachers are complaint about Michael. They start to question the reason behind his acceptance at school because he never want to listen or even speak to them. The teachers imply that Michael should no longer be in the school because of his learning disabilities. The same cases occurs when Michael has struggle during his first football practice. The coach believes that Michael's miserable childhood is an excellent emotional preparation for a football defense. But Michael looks

confused, reluctant and does not want to hurt anyone. It makes the coach underestimate his ability and regret having recruited him.

The second case occurs when Leigh Anne Touhy allows Michael to stay the night at her house. But soon after that, she put suspicious on him and afraid that Michael will steal something. She hardly sleep that night because she feels threatened by Michael's presence in her house. A similar case occurs when Leigh Anne and her friends are having a lunch in a fancy restaurant. Elaine, one of her friends, tells her worried about Michael's presence in Leigh Anne's home that may be harm her daughter's safety. She believes that people from the black race are more likely to be insolent against women. It shows that the white people prejudice toward Michael arise due to the negative stereotypes of black people who are always related to crime.

### **4.5.3 Michael's efforts to overcome his racial problem**

#### **4.5.3.1 Improving his social skills**

After being adopted by Touhy's family, Michael's appearance starts to change and it made him become more confident person. Michael also improves his social skills by being more friendly so that the teachers and the other students change their perception of him. His progress slowly reduces the racial discrimination he faces at school. It can be proven in **Picture J1**, which uses long shot to show that Michael play along with the two little girls who run away from him on his first day of school. They are no longer afraid of him and even greet him first. Michael's

relationship with his teachers at school also improve. In **Picture J2**, a medium shots uses to illustrate that Michael begin to interact with his teacher at school.



**J1.** 00:47:45 [Disc 1]



**J2.** 00:37:41 [Disc 1]

#### **4.5.3.2 Becoming the hero in his football team**

There is another aspect that Michael uses to fight his racial problem, that is through his achievements in football. In **Picture K1**, a long shot uses to illustrate the field where Michael regularly practices football with SJ to improve his athletic skills. Later, during the match, he has the initiative to change the game strategy and leads his team to victory. He also manage to get the Crusaders Team to play for private school championship. This scene on **Picture K2** uses a medium shot to illustrate the happy expressions of Michael and his team while celebrating their victory.



**K1.** 00:52:12 [Disc 1]



**K2.** 00:26:01 [Disc 2]



#### 4.5.3.3 Increasing his academic skills

Michael's achievement in football give him an opportunity to earn many scholarships from several colleges. However, he must improves his grades to fullfil the admission requirements. With the help of his private tutor, Mrs. Sue, he graduated from high school with good grades and makes all of the teachers proud of him. They are no longer underestimate his ability in both academics and sports. This scene on **Picture L** uses a close shot to illustrate the happy expressions of Michael on his graduation day.



**L.** 00:34:41 [Disc 2]

## 5. CONCLUSION

According to the discussion on the previous chapter, it can be concluded that racial discrimination against black people still exist in 21th century, particularly in Tennessee, America. There are two main characters in this movie, namely Michael Oher and Leigh Anne Touhy. They are classified as round characters. The setting of place in *The Blind Side* movie depicts Michael's previous life in Hurt Village and his life with Touhy's family in east part of Memphis. The differences between the social environment causes a conflict and racial issues experienced by Michael Oher as a black people who lives in the white people neighborhood.

In the term of cinematic elements, different types of shot are used on the people's interaction, such as medium shot and long shot. The dominating shoot in this movie is using long shot and the shooting tends to be taken indoors, especially in Wingate Christian School and Touhy's mansion to depicts Michael Oher's life in his new environment.

Michael Oher suffered from racial discrimination because of his physical characteristics such as the size and his skin color which indicates that he came from the black race. As a rejection forms of his existence, Michael experienced the explicit discrimination in the forms of non-verbal antagonism such as the cynical look of his classmate and discrimination in the form of avoidance. He also faces automatic discrimination which reflected in the prejudicial treatments from white people due to the negative stereotypes of black people who are always related to crime.



There are several Michael's effort to overcome his racial problems. First, he tries to improving his social skills by interacting with the other students and his teachers. Second, he gradually practices football to improving his athletic skills and is able to lead his team to victory. Third, he increasing his academic skills and graduated from high school with good grades. Michael's progress slowly reduce the racial discrimination he faces at school and makes the teachers no longer underestimate his ability in both academics and sports. Michael proves that he can be free from the bullying and being capable to equally stand next to white people in America with his strong determination and hard work.

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